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Concerning the

Use of Reason

I N

PROPOSITIONS,

The Evidence whereof depends
upon Human Testimony.

by Auth. Collins Esqr

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L O N D O N;

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*An ESSAY concerning the Use of
Reason, &c.*

Sect. 1. **I** AM not ignorant of the various significations of the word *Reason* in popular Discourses, but shall not confound or perplex my Reader with enumerating them. I shall only give him that Idea I design by it in the following Discourse. By *Reason* I understand *that faculty of the Mind, whereby it perceives the Truth, Falshood, Probability or Improbability of Propositions.* To render this Definition more perspicuous, I shall consider the nature of a Proposition, and the various exercise of the Mind, with relation to all kinds of Propositions.

1st. All Propositions whatever consist of Terms or Words which stand for Ideas, concerning which some agreement is affirm'd or deny'd; as, *that the Whole is equal to all its parts; or, that some of the parts are not equal to the Whole.* *Is* or *is not* are those Terms which signify the agreement or disagreement. Therefore when Truth, Falshood, Probability or Improbability are applied to Propositions, nothing is meant by them but the necessary or probable agreement or disagreement of the Ideas of which the extremes in Propositions consist, as will farther appear if we consider,

2^{dly}. The actions of the Mind, with relation to true, false, probable or improbable Propositions.

(1st.) There are some Ideas join'd in Propositions, which the Mind perceives to agree or disagree immediately or intuitively, without the use of Proof or intermediate Ideas to discover that agreement or disagreement; such as, *Where there is property there may be injustice: Where there is no property there is no injustice: Two and two are four, two and two are not four*, and a thousand others of the like kind.

(2^{dly}.) There are other Ideas join'd in Propositions, which the Mind does not perceive to agree or disagree without the use of Proof or intermediate Ideas: as when I consider this Proposition, that *Men are by nature Equal*, or in other Terms have not exclusively of one another any political Power over one another. Now not being satisfied by an immediate view of the Ideas join'd, *Men* and *Equality*, of the truth or falshood of the Proposition, I cast about for intermediate Ideas, which may discover the agreement or disagreement of the Ideas in question. If I cannot find any distinguishing mark or sign by a Survey of my own Ideas, or the Word of God, whereby I may distinguish the Person or Persons particularly intrusted with this Political Power; the connection of the Ideas *Men* and *Equality* is evident, that is, they do agree, as they would disagree, could I by the survey of my own Ideas find out some distinguishing mark, or that God had in his Word interpos'd in behalf of a particular Person and his Family.

(3^{dly}.) There are Ideas join'd in Propositions, which the Mind perceives to agree or disagree but probably: as, *That there are other Worlds besides that we inhabit*; or, *That an Oak cannot grow up to the size, in an hour, which Trees of that kind have in their Perfection*,

(4^{thly}.)

(4thly.) There are Ideas join'd in Propositions, which the Mind perceives to agree or disagree by the Testimony of others: and tho the agreement or disagreement of such Ideas be but probable, yet such Propositions are very justly distinguishable from those Propositions, whose probable agreement or disagreement the mind perceives by intermediate Ideas, that are an internal Evidence to discover that agreement or disagreement; whereas Testimony is an external Evidence, and the thing testified of might be neither the object of Assent nor Dissent, but for the sake of the Testimony.

Sect. 2. Upon the Mind's perceiving the agreement or disagreement of Ideas immediately or by the intervention of Ideas, which have a necessary or probable agreement, or by the help of Testimony, there follows an Assent of the Mind, which is different according to the different nature of the Evidence, whereby the Ideas join'd in a Proposition seem to agree or disagree. When the agreement or disagreement is visible at first sight, or by the help of an intermediate Idea, which has a necessary Connexion with the Ideas join'd, our Assent is then call'd *Science*. When the agreement or disagreement by the intervention of intermediate Ideas that internally discover the agreement or disagreement, is but probable, our Assent is then call'd *Opinion*: and when we perceive by Testimony, our Assent is then call'd *Faith*.

Sect. 3. From what has been said, it is plain that *Reason* does its part in all kind of Propositions, and that the Assent is proportion'd according to the degree of Evidence that each Proposition has. I shall not be more particular
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in explaining its use, with relation to matters of *Science* or *Opinion*, any farther than is necessary to set in a clear light its *use* in Propositions, whose Truth depends upon Testimony ; which will clearly appear by considering the nature of Testimony, the nature of the things testified, their relation to one another, and to the other Objects of the Understanding, whether they be matters of *Science* or *Opinion*.

Sect. 4. Testimony, or the Witness of Men to the Truth of Propositions of fact, is a very great foundation of our Knowledg. All our History of the rise and fall of States, all our Journeys for Wealth, pleasure or improvement of the Mind, all our Experiments upon record in Physick and natural Philosophy, are founded on the Testimony of Men. Upon that likewise is founded our belief of reveal'd Religion, which can have no other Foundation, unless Miracles were every day wrought for its Confirmation before our Eyes, or that every particular man had once in his Life an immediate Communication from God of all its divine Truths. But for as much as single Men may testify a falshood, and several Men may agree together to testify a falshood, and in some cases Men may have their senses impos'd on, and be deceiv'd ; Testimony of it self is not sufficient to procure Faith or Assent, unless accompanied with these two Circumstances, credibility of Persons, and credibility of the Things related.

1st. By *Credibility of Persons*, I understand Mens having the means of Information, Capacity to understand, Honesty and Disinterestedness.

2^{dly}. By *Credibility of Things* related, I understand,

(1st.) That

(1st.) That the words made use of in the *Relation* stand for known Ideas, or Ideas that we are capable of forming; for if they stand for Ideas that we know not, or want Faculties to perceive, there are then no objects for the Mind to exert it self upon. Nothing remains but mere Sounds, which without significations are no more to it than the sounds of a Trumpet, or a Hautboy.

(2dly.) The words must stand for those Ideas which the use of Language has appropriated them to, or for what the Author or Relator says he understands by them, or for what the visible design of the Author or *Relator* determines them to signify. These are all the ways of knowing the meaning of Words: and if we cannot find out the meaning of a Man's words by comparing him with himself, by the use of the Language in which he writes, or by his particular Definitions, it is all one to the Reader or Hearer, as if the words stood for Ideas he knew nothing of: for an inability to find out Ideas, signify'd by words that we have faculties to perceive, leaves the Mind as much without an Object, as when they stand for Ideas which we have not faculties to perceive. Indeed with relation to words standing either for Ideas which we have not Faculties to perceive, or for Ideas that we have Faculties to perceive, without knowing what those Ideas are, a Man is capable of these actions of his Mind, of believing that those words stand for Ideas, and that the Ideas signify'd by them have a relation to one another. As for instance, a Man born Blind that hears a large discourse of Colours, of which he has no manner of Ideas, and is incapable of having any, cannot give his Assent to any particular Proposition about them. When he is told that his

his Face is red or white, he understands no more than if he was told his *Face was Coushed*; unless it be this, that from the Integrity of the Person he converses with, he believes something is signify'd by that Word, and that that meaning has a relation to his Face. The case is just the same when we hear two *Chinese* discourse. They use sounds to one another which we understand not, and consequently assent not to one word they say. And yet we may believe they understand one another, and talk truth to one another. Now in performing these actions of the Mind, a Man goes not one step beyond his Ideas; for the Proposition assented to stands both for known Ideas, and as much is understood as could be suppos'd to be intended by the Person who talk'd to the blind Man of Colours. For the blind Man's Assent is confin'd to this; that the words red or white stand for a general undetermin'd Idea of something, to which he adds a general undetermin'd Idea of Relation, without any Ideas of the thing or its particular relation. I had not been so particular upon this, which visibly falls in with what I made requisite in the first place to the credibility of a *Relation* or Story, but that the misapprehensions about this matter have been the occasion of a great deal of wrangling in the Controversy of *Mysterys*.

(3dly.) I must not only have Ideas to the words, but the Propositions which consist of Ideas must not be repugnant to one another, nor to what we *know* to be true by the use of our Faculties. By *knowing a thing to be true*, I understand *knowing* strictly so call'd: for let a Proposition be ever so improbable, if it amounts not to a repugnancy to another Proposition in the Historical Relation, or to one which is self-evident,

vident, or whose Ideas I perceive necessarily agree by the intervention of an intermediate Idea, it may be receiv'd as a Truth from a credible Author. That an Oak should grow up to the size and stature of a Tree of that kind in its perfection in less than an hour, tho' very improbable, is as possible as that it should do so in an hundred and fifty Years, and consequently as free from Contradiction; for all Growth is by the addition of new Particles, which by a brisker motion than ordinary must produce as great a Bulk in a little time, as a slower motion in a longer time. In a word, when the Person or Persons are credible, all difficulties whatever, as to the thing testify'd, that come short of a Contradiction of one part of the *Relation* to another part of it, or to what we know otherwise to be true, hinder not the thing related from being credible, and consequently hinder it not from becoming the Object of our Faith or Assent.

1. Because this would put an Impossibility on Men. Men can only say they believe Contradictions, but cannot believe them. To affirm and deny the same thing at the same time, supposes belief and disbelief at the same time, which cannot be. To say we believe the Whole is equal to all its Parts, and to say we believe the Whole is not equal to all its Parts, is to say Nothing, and consequently to believe or disbelieve Nothing; the Assent or Dissent being limited to nothing particular.

2. I ask if there is any *Criterion* of Truth whereby we may distinguish a true from a false proposition? If we have no *Criterion*, then no proposition whatever can be advanc'd but what will be justly contested, and be impossible to be pronounc'd true or false. If there is a *Cri-*

terion, I desire to know what it is? I know no other but *Perception*: for tho Truth abstractly consider'd consists in the relations of agreement between Ideas; yet being here consider'd relatively to human Understanding, it is not my Truth till I perceive it, nor can I know it to be true but by my own *Perception*. *Perception* therefore must be every Man's *Criterion* to distinguish Truth from Falshood. By this I deny not the distinctions of real and seeming Appearances, real and seeming Contradictions. There is often a just ground for such a Distinction, and we may every day be convinc'd of it by examining the appearances of Things. We shall see that some Propositions did only seem to be repugnant to Reason, but were not really so. Yet notwithstanding that, we can only govern our selves by seeming relations and appearances, because real relations and appearances can but seem to be relations and appearances. Now if the *Perception* of the relations of Ideas be every Man's *Criterion*, then that must perpetually be suppos'd to be so in all the train of our Reasonings, and in all Propositions that are offer'd to our Assent; for if there be any one instance offer'd to our Assent, which destroys our *Perception*, then our *Perception* is not our *Criterion*, but something else: therefore I say, if *Perception* be our *Criterion*, we cannot assent to two Propositions, which we perceive, or think that we perceive to be repugnant to each other.

3. We cannot be suppos'd to arrive at the knowledg of any antient Fact, whether it be a Revelation of God or any other Fact, but by the supposition of a Power in us, by comparing things with one another, to perceive their relations on such Comparison. Now to allow

Perception to bring us to the knowledge of a Revelation or other Fact, and to suppose our Perception in some Instances of that Revelation or Fact not a just Criterion, whereby to distinguish things repugnant from things that are not so, is to destroy the Proofs of that Revelation or Fact, which suppos'd my Perception to be a just *Criterion*.

4. Testimony is as much an Application to our Faculties, tho it relates to a Revelation from God, as when it relates to any other Fact; and therefore the Propositions in that Revelation must be sutable to the Apprehension of our Faculties. Suppose a Book was deliver'd to us as a Revelation from God upon Human Authority, that contain'd nothing but Affirmations or Negations contrary to our *Perceptions*, That Five and Five was Eleven, That the Parts which constitute the Whole were not equal to the Whole, and innumerable such others as might be nam'd: what cou'd such a Book do but turn the World upside down, bring Confusion, Disorder, and Uncertainty into all the Affairs of Mankind? And if the understanding these words, *This is my Body*, to signify the Popish Transubstantiation, does not produce all those dismal Effects, it is only because Men do not argue consistently and consequentially from them as understood in that Sense. What Dr. Tillotson says in his Sermons, *Suppose a Man should bring the highest Testimony imaginable of his Divine Mission, by working a Miracle for the Confirmation of his Doctrine; yet if there were any thing in the Doctrine repugnant to the natural Notions which I have of God, I could not receive it as coming from God*; is by a Parity of Reason applicable to any other absurd Doctrines, tho confirm'd by any Evidence

whatever, as well as to Doctrines repugnant to our natural Notions of God. For if there is equal certainty to be had of the Absurdity of other things, or their Repugnancy to our natural Notions, as there is of what is repugnant to the natural Notions of God; and if our natural Notions of other things are as certain as our natural Notions of God, then it follows, that nothing which we judge repugnant to natural Notions ought to be assented to upon the highest Testimony whatever.

5. The Proofs of any matter of Fact not being in themselves so sure as is the Evidence of several Propositions, that by the Use of my Faculties I perceive to be true, there is no ground to admit any matter of Fact as true, which contradicts a Proposition built on greater Evidence.

6. There are no signs of Religion observable among Brutes; and therefore it is a very proper Distinction between Men and Brutes, That the one is capable of Religion, but not the other. Now tho this makes a difference between them, yet it gives no advantage to Man over Brutes, but sinks him below them, upon supposition that Religion consists in the Belief of Propositions, either repugnant to one another, or to Propositions which we perceive to be true: for by assenting to such we put off Human Nature, or else are under uncertainties in all our Conduct; and are so much worse than Beasts, who by their Condition are not subject to our Perplexities, for having any Religion. And I would fain know in what good sense Religion can be said to be natural to Man, when it is suppos'd to be contradictory to the Perceptions of our Faculties.

Sect. 5. Thus it appears that these three Qualifications are necessary to make a matter of Fact credible upon any Testimony whatever : so that the Use of Reason in matters whose Evidence depends upon Testimony, is to perceive the Credibility of the Witness or Witnesses, and the Credibility of the thing testified ; both which produce an Evidence which forces our Assent, as really as the Perception of the necessary agreement of Ideas. But there is still a farther use of Reason in things, which merely by the Testimony of Men are suppos'd to come from God, as distinguish'd from other Facts ; and that is, to endeavour to find out such a sense of a suppos'd Revelation as is agreeable to the discoverys of our Reason, if the words under any kind of Construction will bear it, tho at first view they may seem repugnant to Reason, and to one another. This is certainly a great piece of Justice, and what is due to words, which upon the least Evidence can be suppos'd to come from God ; especially since Expressions which do not literally square with the Maxims of Reason and Philosophy, are necessary to make a Revelation have any effect on common Peoples minds. For was not God to be represented by Expressions, which literally understood attribute to him Human Passions and Actions, they who by their Occupations in the World are incapable of those more just Ideas which Men of Thought know belong to that *Being*, would perhaps think him incapable of taking cognizance of their Actions : and therefore to make a Revelation useful and credible in it self, it must consist of Words whose literal meaning is False, but whose real meaning is consistent with the justest Notions of Reason and Philosophy. And therefore

therefore we ought to examine whether the Words under any Construction will bear a reasonable Sense. Let us apply this more particularly to the Revelation that we acknowledg. It is most evident that the Authors of the Holy Scriptures had not principally in view Speculative Instruction. They do not use their Phrases as they do who have studied the rules of Writing, that define their Words and use them always in the same sense, but adapt their Expressions to the capacity of the bulk of Mankind. No doubt, had *Moses* or any of the inspired Writers been to write a Treatise of Metaphysicks, wherein they had treated of God, they most certainly would have spoken of him with exactness, and have elevated their Minds above all created Beings, and put nothing to appearance into their Idea of God, but what belong'd to an infinitely perfect Being. But in Treatises design'd principally to have a moral effect, they make use of Expressions most likely to attain that end. God is therefore represented as having both Parts and Passions in the Scriptures. It is said, That he (a) *Rests*, (b) *Repents*, (c) is capable of *Anger*, (d) *is ignorant of the State of Adam*, (e) *is cheer'd with Wine*, (f) *Comes down to see how things are*, (g) *Stands before Moses on the Rock of Horeb*, (h) *has a Face*, (i) *a Finger with which he writes*, and (k) *back Parts*. And therefore to understand such a Book literally, and not make use of common Sense whereby to adjust the several popular Expressions wherewith it abounds, to the Maxims

(a) Gen. 2. 3. (b) Gen. 6. 6. Exod. 32. 14. (c) Exod. 32. 10. (d) Gen. 18. 21, 26, 28, 30. (e) Judg. 9. 13. (f) Gen. 11. 5, 7, 18, 21. Exod. 3. 4. (g) Exod. 17. 6. (h) Gen. 32. 30. Exod. 33. 11. (i) Exod. 31. 18. (k) Exod. 33. 23.

of Reason and Philosophy, would be unreasonable in it self, and justly expose it to the Scorn of Unbelievers. The Scripture it self in other parts does suppose these Expressions to be literally false, when it tells us, that *God is invisible* *, and *a Spirit* †; which is as much as to say that he is without Parts and Passions, and consequently incapable of Standing, coming Down, having a Finger, back Parts, or Repenting, being Angry, Ignorant, or cheer'd with Wine. Now this latter Idea of God agreeing with our common demonstrated Notions of Reason and Philosophy, we accommodate the Expressions first cited to these last, and not the last to the first; and ought to have done so, tho the Scriptures had been intirely silent as to God's being *Invisible* and a *Spirit*, tho the contrary might have been a just rule in interpreting the words of any *Greek* or *Roman* Author. We know it is impossible for God to mean absurdly, but for Man it is not. *Herodotus* and *Livy* may abound with false History, false Divinity, and false Reasoning; but the Spirit of God can speak nothing but Truth. That most excellent Person Archbishop *Tillotson* has a Passage very full to my purpose. *There Sermons* is, says he, *no necessity that it should any where Vol. 7. have been said in Scripture, God is a Spirit; it P. 301. being the natural Notion of God; no more than it is necessary it should be told us that God is Good, or that he is Infinite, and the like; or that the Scriptures should tell us that there is a God. All these are manifest by the Light of Nature; and therefore it doth not teach us Philosophy, nor solicitously instruct us in those things which are born with us, but supposeth the Knowledge of them.*

* 1 Tim. 1. 17. Heb. 11. 27. † John 4. 24.

Sect. 6. Besides endeavouring to put a true sense on Words, which literally understood imply what is false, there is still this farther respect due to Writings, which upon Human Testimony are suppos'd to come from God; not to reject the whole for the sake of some Passages which cannot be suppos'd to proceed from God, but rather to presume they have been added to the Text, out of some particular Views and Designs: Whereas merely Human Writings may be fairly rejected, or deny'd to proceed from the Author whose name they bear, if there are several Passages contain'd in them Inconsistent with the Character of the Authors or the Times wherein they liv'd; because there is not that reason for either zealous or designing Men to make additions to Books that are not suppos'd necessary for the direction of our Theory and Practice, as to those that have or are likely to have any influence on our Lives and Opinions. And this respect due to Writings, which upon Human Testimony are suppos'd to come from God, is acknowledg'd necessary by several (if not all) Interpreters of the Scriptures, to prevent the imputation of Falshood, which otherwise would necessarily be fix'd on them by the best-dispos'd Minds. A few instances will show the reasonableness of the Rule, and its Application to what we esteem of Divine Revelation.

1st. In *Exodus 16. 35.* it is said, *And the Children of Israel did eat Manna forty Years until they came to a Land inhabited: they did eat Manna until they came to the borders of the Land of Canaan.* Now God could never make *Moses* (who wrote this Book) say that the Children of Israel did eat Manna forty Years, when he died before the forty Years in which the Children of

of Israel eat Manna were expir'd; and consequently, as the celebrated * *Huetius* argues, *It is most likely that these words were added by Esdras, who, in another † place, he says, did supply the Scriptures with Additions in those places which were obscure or difficult.*

* Dem.
Evang.
Edit. Par.
p. 180.
† P. 178.

2dly. Another Instance to this purpose may be found in Deut. 3. 14. *Jair Son of Manasseh took all the Country of Argob unto the Coasts of Geshuri and Maachathi; and call'd them after his own Name, Bashanhavoth-Jair, unto this day.* Now God by *Moses* could never have said *unto this day*; for *Jair* was but just in possession of the Country of Argob, call'd by him *Bashanhavoth-Jair*, before *Moses's* Death: whereas the words *unto this day*, suppose the Country of Argob had gone a long while under the name of *Bashanhavoth-Jair*, and plainly proceed from a Modern Antiquary, who gives the Original and Reason of a Name of a Place, which has been for a long while in use. This Instance makes || *Huetius* confess that either *Esdras* added these || P. 178.
Words, or that they have crept into the Text from the Margin. I might multiply Instances of this kind, and particularly with respect to the Books of *Moses* and *Joshua* show how almost all the Names of Places in their Writings were modern to the time wherein they wrote, and consequently that the old Names were left out, and the new substituted in their room, as likewise in the Accounts of *Moses's* and *Joshua's* Deaths, which were no doubt added to their Books: but that it is besides my design here to be particular beyond what is requisite to prove the necessity of the use of Reason to distinguish Falshood from Truth in matters of Revelation, in order to give all possible Authority to that which can with any reason be suppos'd to be a Revelation.

Sect. 7. Having laid down the Use of Reason in things whose Evidence depends upon Human Testimony, I shall consider the principal Objections that may be urg'd against what I have deliver'd; and I cannot do that more effectually than by examining the several Senses put on the famous Distinction of *Things above, and Things contrary to Reason*: for 'tis chiefly by virtue of that Distinction the Divines militate in behalf of Mysterys and Contradictions, against those who say they can only believe that which they can understand. But before I proceed, I shall briefly lay down the Distinction of Propositions one from another, as they are the Objects of our Assent or Dissent. Propositions, however offer'd to us, consisting of Terms which stand for Ideas and their Relations, we assent when the Relations between the Ideas join'd are agreeable to Reason, and dissent when they are contrary to Reason. As for instance, I am assur'd by proper Evidence of Jesus Christ's Resurrection. His Resurrection containing no repugnancy to any Truth that I know of, becomes by the Evidence of Testimony agreeable to my Reason, as much as any Proposition in Mathematicks does by the mere use of my own Faculties, or the assistance of others. But the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, containing a manifest repugnancy to several Propositions which I know to be true, is contrary to Reason, as any Proposition is, in any Science whatever, that consists of repugnant Ideas. These two Propositions do indeed become Objects of Assent or Dissent by the means of Testimony; but the different manner of their becoming Objects of my Understanding from other Propositions, distinguishes them not from any other Propositions consider'd as Objects of Assent or Dissent.

Dissent. In all Cases the Assent should follow the perception of the agreement of Ideas, as the Dissent should the repugnancy of Ideas. So that all Propositions consider'd as Objects of Assent or Dissent, are adequately divided into Propositions agreeable or contrary to Reason; and there remains no third Idea under which to rank them, as will appear more plainly by examining the Senses assignable to the words *above Reason*, which are applied to some Propositions, as contradistinguish'd from Propositions agreeable to, and contrary to Reason.

1. The first Sense of the Distinction of *things above and contrary to Reason*, I shall take from Mr. Boyle, who in a Tract subjoin'd to his *Christian Virtuoso*, wherein he particularly treats of that Distinction, says: Suppose that on a deep Sea P. 3, 4. a Diver should bid you tell him what you can see there; that which you would answer, would be, that you can see into a Sea-green Liquor to the depth of some Yards, and no farther: So that if he should further ask you whether you see what lies at the bottom of the Sea, you would return him a Negative answer. If afterwards the Diver letting himself down to the Bottom, should thence bring up and shew you Oysters and Muscles with Pearls in them; you would easily acknowledg both that they lay beyond the reach of your sight, and consequently argued an Imperfection in it, and that the Pearls have the genuin Lustre and Colour that naturally belongs to such Gems. But if this Diver should pretend that each of these Pearls he shews you, is as large as a Tennis-Ball, or some of them bigger than the Shells they were inclos'd in, you would doubtless judg what he asserts contrary to the Informations of your Eyes. What Mr. Boyle means by this Instance is undoubtedly true: for every one may experience that there are several things become

Objects of our Senses by the means of others, which merely by the use of our Facultys employ'd about our own Ideas we should not have arriv'd at, but when made known to us are agreeable to our Reason. But as the Terms *contrary to Reason* stand not for one manner of arriving at the Perception of Propositions distinct from another manner, but only for the repugnant appearance of any Propositions, however they become Objects of the Understanding; so *above Reason* must stand for another kind of appearance of Objects to our Understanding, in order to make a Distinction; for a Distinction supposes some common Agreement in the things distinguish'd. Now what common Agreement is there between things repugnant to Reason, however they become Objects of our Understanding, and things that become Objects of our Understanding after a peculiar manner? One manner is properly distinguishable from another manner, as the manner of knowing by a Diver is different from the manner of arriving at Truth by the mere use of one's own Ideas. And the appearances of things to our Understanding are different, and so distinguishable; but the manner and the appearance are improperly distinguish'd, and serve only to confound Men. The distinction therefore must lie in a different manner of appearance of things to our Understanding, from what repugnant Propositions, or Propositions contrary to Reason do; and that I conceive can only lie in being *agreeable to Reason*.

2. A second Sense of this Distinction may be illustrated by this Instance. Let us suppose a Traveller, to whose Character there is no exception, gives us Informations of Places unknown to us before his Discovery; That they are inhabited by Men like our selves, that are link'd

link'd together in Civil Government, that worship the Sun, Moon, and Stars, and have not the use of Fire. All which is both credible in it self, and beyond the Powers of our own Minds, by the use of our Ideas, without the assistance of Testimony, to know; as it was in the former Case, without the assistance of the Diver, to know what was at the bottom of the Sea: but if he should say that the Men have existed there from all Eternity, he would advance not only what was above our Reason to discover, but what was contrary to it. The distinction us'd in this sense is liable to just the same Objection as was urg'd in the former Case. For here that Distinction is made to lie between the manner of arriving at a Proposition, and the appearance of a Proposition to our Understanding, (*above Reason* signifying things which we know by Testimony, and *contrary to Reason* things that appear repugnant to Reason, and so not a proper Distinction.) If the Distinction lie as it ought between the things consider'd as Objects of the Understanding, having different appearances to it, those things before mention'd as *above Reason*, will be agreeable to Reason: for that there are Places unknown to us, that they are inhabited by Men, &c. are all Suppositions that are agreeable to Reason, or contain no Absurdity in them; and consequently there is no ground for any other Distinction of things, as Objects of our Assent or Dissent, but that they be either agreeable or contrary to Reason.

3. A thing is said to be *above Reason*, when we have not an Idea exactly conformable to the thing our Idea refers to. What is meant here by *above Reason*, is no doubt true in Fact of most if not all our Ideas; for to be sure we have very few adequate Ideas of things; but *above Reason*,

Reason is here visibly us'd for things that are not at all the Objects of the Understanding; for whatever exists which falls not within the compass of our Ideas, is nothing to us, nor can we talk or think about it. So much as we perceive of a thing by the mediation of Ideas, so much we comprehend, and is agreeable to our Reason; and what we do not perceive by the mediation of Ideas, may, if you please, be call'd *above Reason*, as a thing unknown to us, but not as an Object of the Mind about which we may imploy our Facultys: and 'tis to things as Objects of the Mind, that the Distinction of above and contrary to Reason is apply'd.

4. Things are said to be *above Reason*, when we are ignorant of the manner, or of the Physical Cause of their Existence: As for instance, we know not how Matter exists, nor how the Parts hang together, nor why one System of Matter is Green, and another Red. As in the last instance, so here it is visible the words *above Reason*, do not stand for any thing that is the Object of the Understanding; for whenever the Manner or Physical Cause of a thing is unknown, we can frame no Propositions about it: Nothing remains as an Object for us upon which to exert our Assent or Dissent. We have an Idea of Matter existing, of its Parts cohering, and of its being colour'd; and perfectly comprehend what we have Ideas of, and see no manner of repugnancy in our Conceptions, see nothing but what is perfectly agreeable to Reason: But as for the Physical Causes of these things, which are so agreeable to our Reason, we can no more reason or discourse about them than a blind Man can about Colours, or any Man can about what St. Paul saw when he was lifted up into the third Heavens; and
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consequently the words *above Reason*, in this sense, stand for nothing which is the Object of the Understanding.

5. By *things above Reason* is sometimes understood things of which we have no Idea, and which yet may be the Objects of our Assent. Now tho, beyond dispute, a great many things exist of which we have no Idea; yet Ideas and Acts of the Mind being relative, there can be no Act of the Mind where there is no Idea, or no Object: and therefore tho there is a just ground, from the narrowness of our Understanding, to say things exist of which we have no Idea; yet there is no ground, in this sense, to apply the Distinction to Objects of the Understanding: for then a thing might be an Object of the Understanding, and not an Object at the same time. But lest I may be thought to injure somebody in this sense of the Distinction, I will show the Reader that Dr. *Gastrel* (and I might instance in many Divines) makes the Doctrine of the Trinity no otherwise the Object of our Faith, than in this last sense given to the words *above Reason*. In his *Considerations of the Trinity*, having enumerated all the Kinds of *Unity and Distinction* that he could imagine, as he says, he gives us, pursuant to that Enumeration, two Definitions of the word *Person*. 1. *A particular Intelligent Being*. 2. *An Office, Character, or some such complex Notion applicable to such a Being*. In the first sense, says he, one *Man*, or one *Angel*, is one *Person*: and several *Men*, or several *Angels*, are several *Persons*. In the second sense of the word, there may be so many *Persons* as there are different *Combinations* of the *Actions, Relations, and Circumstances* of *Intelligent Beings*. Now, says he, *God cannot be Three and One in the same respect, nor three Intelligent Beings,*

Pag. 26.

Pag. 27.

pag. 29. *Brings, for Reasons which he assigns; and then*
 pag. 31. *he concludes in these words: From whence it follows, that according to the Notions we are capable of framing of Unity and Distinction, with reference to the Holy Trinity, all the Personal Distinction we can conceive in the Deity must be founded on some accessory Ideas extrinsecal to the Divine Nature, a certain Combination of which Ideas make up the second Notion signify'd by the word Person. And if we impartially, says he, examine our own Thoughts upon this Subject, we shall find that when we name God the Father, we conceive the Idea of God so far as we are capable of conceiving it acting so and so, under such Respects and Relations; and when we name God the Son, we conceive nothing but the same Idea of God over again under different Relations, and so likewise of the Holy Ghost. But if this be all, says he, that is meant by Trinity and Unity, Three Persons and One God, where is that stupendous Mystery so much ador'd by some? What is it has stagger'd the Faith, and puzzled the Understandings of so many learned and inquisitive Men in all Ages, since this Doctrine was first deliver'd? This, says he, is an invincible Prejudice against the Account now given, and indeed against any other Explication whatsoever that has nothing in it hard to be understood or believ'd: for how can it be imagin'd that what has pass'd for a Mystery these sixteen hundred Years, should now at last be comprehended as plainly as a common ordinary Notion? But if this account of the Trinity be too easy, and falls short of those high Expressions of Distinction found in the Scripture, as he thinks it does; and no other, grounded upon any Notions our Souls have fram'd of Unity and Distinction, can be true and consistent, as he has before particularly prov'd: Then, says he, it necessarily follows, that God must be One and Three in some way and manner not conceivable*

ceivable by Human Understanding. I cannot better expose the Distinction in the sense given in the beginning of this Article, than by what Dr. *Gastrel* here says ; for it amounts to an Endeavour to demonstrate, that if we have Ideas to our Words when we profess to believe in the Doctrine of three Persons and one God, the Ideas must be inconsistent with themselves, or with the Article of the Trinity. If we define the word *Person* by an intelligent Being, we make the Doctrine to consist in this, That three Intelligent Beings are but one Intelligent Being, which is a Contradiction : And if we define *Person* to be an Office or Character, we give an Idea to that Word inconsistent with what is laid down about that Doctrine in the Scripture, where there is evidently a greater Distinction between the Persons than that Definition supposes : for the Persons, according to the Doctor, are made in Scripture to have existed from all Eternity ; whereas that Definition supposes the several Persons had a beginning : for Offices or Characters being *extrinsecal, accessory Ideas*, must commence in some particular point of time, and consequently on that supposition there was a time when there was no Trinity at all. This in others would be call'd doing their utmost to demonstrate the Impossibility of believing the Doctrine of the Trinity ; for what particular Doctrine can be assented to, when we have no Ideas to the Terms that are suppos'd to express it ? All that remains is, that by those Terms in which the Doctrine of the Trinity is express'd, God meant something or had Ideas, and that those Ideas have a relation to one another. Now if our Belief consists only in this, That God has Ideas to such and such Words, and that those Ideas do agree to one another ;

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what can be more plain or less hard to be understood than this? Do we not meet with Men every day that use Words for Ideas peculiar to themselves, and that may for ought we know perceive a Relation between those Ideas? Is there any more Mystery or Difficulty in believing this, than there is in assenting to that Notion of the Trinity, which the Doctor, for its Easiness, rejects; and because there is nothing in it to stagger the Faith of a Man of Learning and Sense? Is not the Easiness of this Notion as invincible a prejudice against believing this to be a just account of the Trinity, as the Easiness of believing the Trinity in Unity, under the Notion of one and the same Being consider'd under different Relations? But tho' this is all that remains upon Dr. *Gastrel's* Principles to be really an Object of Belief; yet in the Question of the Trinity, it is too ridiculous for him plainly and directly to assert, however fully imply'd in his Discourse. The Ridiculousness of it will appear if we consider, that when the Unitarians make any Objections to the Doctrine of the Trinity, it must be to that Doctrine consider'd under some Idea; or else they object to they know not what, as well as Dr. *G.* believes he knows not what. But upon the Doctor's Principles, this must be his Answer: Gentlemen, you object as if we meant some particular Doctrine when we profess to believe in the Doctrine of the Trinity, or had Ideas to the words that we use on that occasion; but we mean no particular Doctrine at all, and therefore your Objections are not level'd against the Doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed we have thought fit to enlarge our form of words, by composing the *Athanasian* Creed; but we mean no more by that Creed than we did before,

which

which was nothing at all, unless it were to give those Men a good many words that signify nothing, who were not satisfy'd with nothing in a few words. So that in short, the *Trinitarians*, according to the Doctor, must believe that God himself came down from Heaven to reveal his Will to Mankind, and to require Man's Assent to a Revelation, one of the fundamental Articles, without which a Man cannot be a Christian, is express'd in such a manner, that God might as well have given us Marks or written Characters that answer'd to no one Language known among Men; and there would have been just as much matter for Belief, as there can be in Signs that we are accusom'd to, and can give no particular signification of. However, to make Dr. G. somewhat more considerable than this reasoning of his does, I give him an Authority on his side. *St. Austin* says, *When Men ask what is meant by the Three, all Human Speech wants Power to express it; we have ventur'd to say Three Persons, not that it should be said, but that we may not be wholly silent.* And truly the Clergy in all Ages, some out of Pride, unwilling to profess their Ignorance, the more Cunning to get Power and Dominion over the Minds and Consciences of Men, have agreed to talk unintelligibly, and the most zealous out of Ignorance; and 'tis Charity perfectly if I rank the Doctor among the last: tho some may think he wrote with a design to expose the Doctrine of the Trinity, which, he says, is so much ador'd by some; and from some Passages may be induc'd to believe that he thinks he has demonstrated the Impossibility of believing that Doctrine; because among the Conditions requisite to make it possible for us to believe a thing, he makes this to be one, that we understand the Terms: for

Faith, says he, *concerns only the Truth and Fals-
hood of Propositions ; the Terms of which a Propo-
sition consists must be understood before we can pro-
nounce any thing concerning the Truth or Falshood of
it, which is nothing but the Agreement or Disagree-
ment of its Terms, or the Ideas express'd by them.
If I have no knowledg at all of the meaning of the
Terms us'd in a Proposition, I cannot exercise any
act of my Understanding about it, I cannot say I
believe or disbelieve any thing ; my Soul is perfectly
in the same State it was before, without receiving
any new Determination.* In the Passages I cited
out of Dr. *Gastrel* before, he endeavours to de-
monstrate that we have no Meaning or Ideas to
the words, which express the Doctrine of the
Trinity ; and in this Passage he gives us his O-
pinion what a Man can do in that Case, *That
he cannot exercise any act of his Understanding a-
bout it ; that he cannot believe or disbelieve any
thing.* I say, I should be tempted to think that
the Doctor could hardly help putting these Pas-
sages together, and form a suitable Act of his
Understanding ; *i. e.* neither believe nor disbe-
lieve the Doctrine of the Trinity : but I do not
know what to think of him or his Capacity,
Pag. 26.
when I find him saying, *That Identity is nothing
else but a repetition of Unity, as Number is of Dif-
ference :* Whereas Identity consists in this, *That
the Ideas it is attributed to, or for which the
Term stands, vary not at all from what they
were that moment wherein we consider their
former Existence, and to which we compare
the present ; and Number consists not in a repe-
tition of Difference, as the Doctor says, but in a
repetition of Unity.* And I may e'en put him
here on the level with his Adversary Dr. *Sher-
lock*, who has got as much Reputation by wri-
ting Nonsense, as Dr. *Gastrel* would have lost
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had he wrote nothing but Sense ; who, in his *Defence of his Notion of a Trinity in Unity, &c.* 4to. 1694. makes this Distinction, That a thing may be *Individual*, but not *Single*. And, P. 18, 19. *That the same one Individual Nature subsists* Pag. 24. *thrice in three real Subsistences, not by multiplying, but only by repeating it self.*

2. The last sense of this Distinction is as follows. Divines not being able to answer the Objections from Reason made to their Doctrines, will sometimes allow them to be contrary to Human Reason, but not contrary to the Divine Reason ; and in that sense understand the Distinction of things above, and things contrary to Reason. So that *above* and *contrary* are words of the same Import, and there is an Equivoque in the use of the word *Reason*. Now the Equivoque lies here, that they do not give the same sense to the word *Reason* in the first part of this Distinction that they do in the last : for suppose that they always understood by *Reason*, Reason in general ; or the Supreme Reason, Reason as it is in God ; it is equally true that the Mysterys of the Gospel are neither above nor contrary to Reason. But if in each branch of this Distinction, by *Reason* is understood Human Reason, then there is no sense in the Distinction ; because they confess that the Mysterys of Religion have not a conformity with the Maxims of Reason and Philosophy, which is the very same thing with being contrary to our Reason : and therefore it would be all one to say, That the Mysterys of Faith are contrary to Reason, as that they are above our Reason. The Distinction then clear'd from all Equivoque lies here, That there are things contrary to Human Reason, but not contrary to Divine Reason. The Writings of the
Clergy

Clergy are full of Expressions which justify the sense I have now put on the Distinction ; and the parallel Instances which they give to justify their assenting to things contrary to Human Reason, are a farther Evidence.

Pag. 83.

Dr. Sherlock, in his *present State of the Socinian Controversy*, says, *He shall tell Dr. G. as evident as he thinks it, this Proposition is false, That it is impossible to believe what implies a Contradiction to our former Knowledg, and that God may oblige us to believe such a Contradiction.*

P. 279.

Mr. Carrol in his *Dissertation on Mr. Lock's tenth Chapter and fourth Book of his Essay on Human Understanding*, as an Instance of Mr. Lock's extolling Reason, and subverting the Nature and Use of Divine Revelation and Faith, produces these words out of Mr. Lock's Essay: " And

B. 4. c. 18.
§. 10.

" therefore nothing, that is contrary to and
" inconsistent with the clear and self-evident
" Dictates of Reason, has a right to be urg'd
" or assented to as a matter of Faith, wherein
" Reason has nothing to do." And again,
" Nor can we be oblig'd, where we have the
" clear and evident sentence of Reason, to quit
" it for the contrary Opinion, under a pre-
" tence that it is a matter of Faith ; which
" can have no Authority against the plain and
" clear Dictates of Reason."

P. 487.

Mr. Gilbert in his *Reflections on Dr. Fleetwood's Essay upon Miracles*, thinks Mr. Clark in the wrong, in affirming, " That a Man may re-
" ject the proof of Miracles, how true or great
" soever, if, in his reason, he thinks the Doc-
" trine they would prove to be an Absurdity,
" or to imply a Contradiction, or to be of
" evil Tendency or Consequence." And thus,

P. 295. of
his Lec-
tures,
vol. 2.

says he, *Mr. Clark has given up all such Ex-
plications of the Eternal Generation of the Son of
God,*

God, as can be reduc'd to imply or involve any Contradiction; which makes him fear lest he be forc'd to give up the Truth of the Scripture it self to those that think they have, by just and necessary Consequences, reduc'd its Doctrine in this or any other Case, or the Sense wherein the Church hath understood it, to imply a Contradiction. Whether the Socinians, at this rate, may not form for us another Gospel, and the Deists reject the whole, is a thing to be consider'd.

The Distinction thus understood is perfectly unintelligible: for tho we have Ideas to the words contrary to *Human Reason*, yet we have none to the words contrary to *Divine Reason*; and so we distinguish *Human Reason* from we know not what; unless we understand by *Divine Reason*, Reason as it is in Man, and then there is no manner of ground for a Distinction, for a thing can never be distinguish'd from it self. However, to make good the Distinction in this sense, some mathematical and physical Instances are produc'd, where it is pretended that Men assent upon no less evidence than Demonstration; and yet the Propositions assented to do seem to us to involve or imply Contradictions. It is demonstrable, says Dr. Edwards, in his fourth Preservative against Socinianism, That Quantity is divisible in infinitum; and yet for all this it is liable to unanswerable Objections: for it seems to overthrow several self-evident and acknowledg'd Truths. Pag. 53.

And, That ever since Euclid's days, it hath been an acknowledg'd Truth, that the Angle of Contact contain'd between a strait Line, and the Circumference of any Circle which it touches, is less than the least Angle contain'd by two strait Lines: And yet what Paradoxes and Absurditys flow from it, acknowledg'd even by Mathematicians themselves?

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Ibid.

That two Lines should for ever approach, and yet never meet one another, is what puzzles and confounds the Imagination to conceive; and yet is found to be certainly true in those Lines which are call'd Asymptot, and prov'd to be so by clear Demonstration.

Upon this I crave leave to remark, that supposing, with respect to these and some other Instances, Man is really reduc'd to this State, as to perceive Demonstration on the one side for the truth of a Proposition, and at the same time perceive *Absurditys* and *Paradoxes* flow from the thing demonstrated: I say, he ought not to assent or dissent, because there is a ballance of Evidence; for any Proposition involving an *Absurdity* or Contradiction, is as much a Demonstration of the falshood of that Proposition, as any grounds *a priori* can be of its Truth; because the Perception of the Disagreement of our Ideas is as plain as is the Perception of the Agreement. Now if it is our Duty neither to assent or dissent in the Cases propos'd, by reason of the ballance of Evidence, they will by no means reach the Case of Articles of Faith, suppos'd to be inconsistent with some self-evident Propositions; because we have no Evidence for the truth of Revelation, equal to our Perception of the truth of those Propositions call'd self-evident: and therefore our Perceptions must be our Rule against any such pretended Revelations. It will perhaps be said, that I destroy the Distinction between real and seeming Contradiction. To which I answer, that I do neither deny nor destroy that Distinction, but do allow of it; but then I say that it is manifestly of no use when apply'd to the Understanding, but only to teach us to examine with Care and Caution, since

we are liable to be deceiv'd, before we leave off Examination: for while things appear repugnant, we must judg them to be repugnant, if we will ever make any judgment at all.

2. I deny, that if we examine carefully, any Contradiction or Absurdity follows from a demonstrated Proposition; and affirm, that wherever we have capacity enough to perceive the truth of a Proposition, we have capacity enough to perceive that there is no repugnancy between that and another true Proposition. And I think I could plainly show that those mathematical and physical Instances might be solv'd, did Men but consider sufficiently the Ideas of their Minds, for of them only Truth consists; and think precisely on them. And I desire those who think them incapable of Solution, to give me but intelligible Definitions of the Words, and I undertake to resolve all the Difficultys attending them. What causes the Difficulty is, that the term *Infinite* is suppos'd to stand for something incomprehensible; whereas *Infinity* ought, like all other words in our Language, to have a determin'd Idea fix'd to it when us'd in a Proposition, and not stand for any thing existing, any farther than it has a conformity to our Idea; and consequently the term *Infinity* should stand for an Idea, which we can as well comprehend as the number *Three*, or the colour *Red*. The contrary seems to me to amount to this great Absurdity, That when we use the term *Infinity*, we have a Meaning or Idea to it, and have not a Meaning to it: This, well attended to, would clear those Instances from the charge of Absurdity. I shall not go over them one by one, because the Propositions themselves are of no great consequence to our Conduct: but that

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it may appear, that I do not omit them out of any difficulty that I conceive to be in them, I shall make choice of two others, which the Men of Mystery constantly dwell on, because they relate to the belief of all Men, and are conceiv'd to be as difficult as any of the former Instances: these are,

(1.) The seeming Inconsistence of the Divine Prescience with the Liberty of Man.

(2.) Our Notion or Idea of Eternity: both which, I doubt not to clear up from all Absurdities, which in our way of conceiving are thought to follow from them; and thereby convince the Reader, that we are not in that absurd State which the Clergy would put us into, nor in that sceptical one which is the direct Consequence of their Opinions.

i. As to the first, *the irreconcilableness of the Divine Prescience with the Liberty of Man*; tho it has been a Problem which has exercis'd the Learned in all Ages, yet I take the matter to be so clear, that I cannot forbear thinking, that nothing but the Interest of some, or Prejudice of others, in behalf of receiv'd Systems, could make it a question of difficulty. I know very well, that Divines put such an Idea to the Term *Liberty*, as is directly inconsistent with the Divine Prescience; for they suppose Liberty to stand for a Power in Man to determine himself, and consequently that there are several Actions of Man absolutely contingent, since they depend as to their Existence on Man, who determines their Existence from himself, without regard to any extrinsecal Causes. Now I readily own it impossible, to make the Divine Prescience consist with such an Idea of Liberty. For all Actions whatever are prov'd to be certain by the supposition of a Divine Prescience

Prescience (for if they are foreknown, they must certainly be) and by the supposition of Man's Liberty in this sense are prov'd to be contingent. Now I cannot put together certain and contingent, or certain and incertain at the same time. I allow the same Action may be certain, and relatively contingent (that is, contingent as to us, or of which together with its Causes we are ignorant before they happen, however certain in themselves; and thus we apply the word Chance, when we are ignorant of the Causes of an Action, tho properly speaking there is no such thing as Chance, because no Action is without its Causes) but the word Contingent is here taken absolutely, or else the Idea of Liberty, as it consists in a Power to determine one's self, without regard to any external Causes compelling it, is destroy'd, and another Idea put into its room, inconsistent with the Liberty contend'd for.

Now this Idea of Liberty is not only inconsistent with the supposition of the Divine Prescience, but inconsistent with Truth: and to make that appear, I shall show wherein our Liberty consists, and then its consistency with the Divine Prescience. Every Man may observe in himself, a Power to do or forbear several Actions, according to the Determination of his Mind: if the Mind determines the doing of an Action, there is in some Cases no outward Impediment to hinder him from acting according to that Determination; and not only no outward Impediment, but the forbearance of the Action would have been equally in his Power, if the Mind had determin'd a forbearance. As for instance; if a Man sits in a Room with the Door open, he has plainly a Power to go out of that Room, if he prefers

going out to staying in ; he has likewise a Power to stay, if he prefers staying to going out. Let his Mind determine which way it will, he has then a Power of acting according to that Determination. And this is the greatest Freedom or Liberty we can conceive to belong to any Being ; and by this Idea of Liberty or Freedom from Compulsion, God is plainly the most free Being that can be conceiv'd, because the doing or forbearing all Actions according to the Determination of his Will, are in his power. He can will nothing but what is possible, and there can be no Bar or Impediment to hinder an omnipotent Being from doing or forbearing things possible in themselves ; tho Man's Liberty is restrain'd to a few Actions by the Weakness of his Powers, very much below the possibility of things. This Idea of Liberty is far from being inconsistent with the certainty of an Action, and consequently with the Divine Prescience : for here is nothing contingent in the whole Chain, but every thing as certain as our Knowledg that God foresees every thing supposes. For there are Causes that ever determine the Will, as the appearing good or evil Consequences ; there are other Causes of the appearing good or evil Consequences, and Causes of those Causes, and so on : and no one Action in this long Progression of Causes, extend it as far as you please, could possibly not happen. For suppose the Color and Flavor of a Peach makes me will it ; while it appears thus agreeable, I must will it. The Peach must appear thus agreeable, while my Appetite and Organs are dispos'd as they are ; and innumerable Causes have preceded to make the Peach appear in the manner it does, such as the Care of the Gardener,

dener, &c. Now my Action of taking or forbearing this Peach is as certain, as is the Color and Flavor which makes it agreeable or disagreeable, or as is the Determination of my Will, according to its appearing agreeableness or disagreeableness (tho it was equally in my power to take or forbear it according to the Determination of my Will: that is, had my Mind determin'd a forbearance, there was no compulsive external Force to oblige me to take it; or had my Mind determin'd the taking of it, there was no external compulsive Force to oblige me to forbear taking it) for while I prefer or will taking the Peach to letting it alone, I cannot help acting, that Preference being the immediate, necessary, impelling Cause; tho I could as plainly, and must as necessarily have let it alone, had my Mind given a different Determination. So that stop where you will in this Train of Causes, you will not, nor cannot have the Idea of any thing, but what has certain and necessary Causes, and consequently what must certainly and necessarily be. I have us'd the words Certainly and Necessarily for the same thing in this case, because I cannot distinguish between *certainly be* and *must be*. They who object this to me must define, that I may see the difference. Now if all the Liberty we have, consists in a Power to do or forbear several Actions, according to the Determinations of our Mind, and that *Liberty* is perfectly consistent with that certainty of our Actions before they are produc'd, then our Liberty is reconcilable with the Divine Prescience, since all the difficulty lay in reconciling the certainty of all future Actions with our Liberty. Nay, I have shown there can be no Liberty but what supposes the certainty

certainty and necessity of all Events. True Liberty therefore is consistent with Necessity, and ought not to be oppos'd to it, but only to Compulsion.

In his
Sermon of
Mysterys,
P. 17.

P. 18.

De Consol.
l. 3.

2. The next difficulty is concerning *Eternity*; upon which the late Reverend Bishop of Worcester, Dr. Stillingfleet, argues thus: *We know, says he, that either God must have been for ever, or it is impossible he should ever be; for if he should come into being when he was not, he must have some Cause of his being, and what was the first Cause would be God; but if he was for ever, he was from himself: And what Notion or Conception can we have in our Minds concerning it? Let Men try their Imaginations about God's Eternity, not merely how he should be from himself, but how God should co-exist with all the differences of Time, and yet there be no Succession in his own being; for where there is Succession, there is a passing out of not being in such a duration into being in it; which is not consistent with the absolute Perfection of the Divine Nature. And therefore God must be all at once what he is, without any respect to the difference of Time past, present; or to come; from whence Eternity was defin'd by Boethius, to be a perfect and compleat Possession, all at once, of Everlasting Life. But how can we form any Conception in our Minds of that Being all at once, which hath such different Acts, as must be measur'd by a long Succession of Time, as the creating and dissolving the Frame of the World, the promising and sending the Messias, the declaring and executing a General Judgment? How can these things be consistent with a permanent or a continuance of Being, without such Succession?*

The Inconsistencys charg'd on the Attribute of Eternity, are on the Consequences of our Idea of it. Now his Lordship ought to have defin'd

defin'd what he meant by the word *Eternity*, that it might have more plainly appear'd whether his Lordship's Inferences are just: but since he has not, I shall define it, in order to show, that no absurdity, nothing inconsistent with the Divine Perfections, or any other parts of our Knowledg, follows from it. By *Eternity* I understand, an Idea of *Duration*, to which it is repugnant to assign a *Beginning* or *End*. His Lordship's first Objection to the Notion of *Eternity*, as apply'd to God, is, *That if he was for ever, he must be from himself; but what Notion or Conception can we have in our Minds concerning it?* This Objection, as I conceive, is directed against that part of our Idea of *Eternity*, which is call'd *Eternity a parte ante*: and I agree, in case the Inference, that God was from himself, is justly drawn from God's being for ever, that we could not frame any consistent Notion or Conception concerning God's *Eternity*. But I think the quite contrary follows from God's being for ever, that if he was for ever, he was of none, or unoriginated: to say he was for ever, and from himself, is to say he was for ever, and was not for ever. Besides, the Expression of *from himself*, amounts, if I understand it, to this, that a Being was before it was; for I cannot understand how a Being can be *from himself*, but by giving it self a Being. If by *from himself* be understood Self-existent, without a cause of his Being, or Independent; then I grant the Inference to be true, That if God was for ever, he was from himself; that is, if he was for ever, he was without a cause of his Being, or Self-existent. But what difficulty there is in that *Notion* or *Conception*, I understand not; the difficulty seems to me to lie on the other side, how God shou'd

should have a Cause of his Being, and yet have existed from Eternity : for by Existence from Eternity, I conceive such an Existence as we cannot conceive not to have existed ; and I take it to be repugnant in it self to suppose every thing had a beginning, and much more so, to suppose what had no beginning had a beginning.

The next Absurdity his Lordship charges on the Attribute of Eternity, is, *How God should co-exist with all the Differences of Time, and yet there be no Succession in his Being ?* This I own to be as absurd as *God's existing from himself*, and that there is a manifest Contradiction in this Notion or Conception ; for if by *Succession in God's Being* is understood (and I know not what other sense to put upon it) co-existing with all the Differences of Time, then his Lordship's Difficulty is how to conceive God to co-exist with all the Parts of Time, and yet not to co-exist with all the Differences of Time. Now I acknowledg I cannot do this : but in behalf of God's Eternity I beg leave to plead, that if God does co-exist with the Differences of Time, then he does co-exist with the Differences of Time ; and it by no means can be said, that he does not co-exist with all the Differences of Time, if it be true that he does co-exist with all the Differences of Time.

But he says, *It is not consistent with the absolute Perfection of the Divine Nature, that there should be a Succession in God, or a Co-existence with all the Differences of Time ; because where there is Succession, there is a passing out of not being in such a Duration into being in it : which is to say, That it is not consistent with the perfection of the Divine Nature that it should co-exist with all the Differences of Time ; because*
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where there is a Co-existence with all the Differences of Time, there is a Co-existence with all the Differences of Time; or, which is the same thing, *A passing out of not being in such a Duration into being in it.* All the Argument comes to this, It is not because it is not. Co-existence with all the Differences of Time is not a Perfection, because Co-existence with all the Differences of Time is not a Perfection.

The Bishop goes on: *And therefore, says he, God must be all at once what he is, without any respect to the Difference of Time past, present, or to come; that is, if it be an Imperfection in God to co-exist with all the Differences of Time, and consequently a false Notion of Eternity, it follows, that God must be all at once, &c.* that is, he must always actually exist in past, present, and future Duration. Now I deny that Consequence; for if both the Notions or Ideas of Eternity are either repugnant to God's Perfections, or consist of repugnant Ideas, it follows that we have no Idea to the word *Eternity*, and that we mean nothing when we use the word *Eternity*. For to attribute Eternity to God in the first sense of that word is impossible, according to his Lordship; because Perfection and Imperfection cannot be put together: and to attribute Eternity to God in the latter sense, is to put together inconsistent Ideas, and to confound the Differences between *is* and *is not*, which in reality Men cannot do: for to say *God exists all at once, &c.* is to say that he actually exists in Time past, present, and to come; that is, that Time past is not past, and that Time to come is come, and was always come. But to give some satisfaction to those that think it an Imperfection for God to co-exist with the several parts of Time, I desire it may be consider'd,

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That if God operates at different times, and takes up the space of six days in the Creation of the World, redeems Mankind 4000 Years after, and will judg Men in a time not yet come, then he operates not all at once ; and if he operates not all at once, then he exists not all at once : for if he existed all at once, there could be no Distinction of Time in his Operations. Past, present, and to come, must be attributed to the Being that operates, as well as to its Operations ; because Operations at different times suppose Succession in the nature of things, and existing all at once supposes no Succession ; and consequently if there is a Succession in the nature of things, there is no such thing in nature as existing all at once. Now if there is no Imperfection in supposing that God acts at different times, as there is not, what Imperfection can there be in supposing that he does not exist now at the time of the general Judgment, any more than that he is not now judging the World ?

'Tis urg'd by many learned Men, that there is a Contradiction to make our Idea of Eternity consist in Succession, to which it is repugnant to assign a beginning or end ; and thus they argue, *That if there has been a Succession of an infinite number of Years, and an infinite number of Days, and an infinite number of Hours, and an infinite number of Minutes, and that Infinites are equal ; then it must follow that the number of Years is equal to the number of Days, Hours and Minutes, which is absurd.* To this I answer, the Idea we have of Eternity is of a Succession of Time, to which it is repugnant to assign a beginning or end. Now to compare two Infinites, supposes two positive, determinate Numbers ; for unless they are so, they cannot be

be compar'd in the sense of the Objection. Now it is a jest to talk of which is most in things that cannot be number'd, as Infinites are suppos'd to be.

2. The term *Eternity* stands for one Idea ; our Idea therefore must be the same, when that term is apply'd to Years, Days, Hours ; and consequently they are all equally infinite or unmeasurable : and what absurdity there lies in supposing things equally unmeasurable, I shall only know when I am shown that any Infinite can be measurable.

3. This Equality, which is the only Equality that can be meant with good sense, whenever the word *Eternity* or *Infinity*, as apply'd to Time, is us'd, *that consists in being unmeasurable*, shows plainly that the Question of which is most in two Infinites is impertinent, because *most* can never have room or place but in determinate Numbers. When two different Numbers, Nine and Eleven, are affirm'd to be equally odd Numbers, would it not be absurd for any one to say they are not equally odd, because one is more than another ? whereas the Equality lies in the Oddness, as in the other case the Equality lies in the Unmeasurableness, or being equally unmeasurable : and therefore nothing can be more absurd than to ask which is most of things that cannot be counted ; Number can only measure a fix'd, a determin'd Succession.

Thus I have drawn up my Thoughts on a nice Subject, in as little compass and as clear a light as I was able, without the mixture of any Art or popular Expressions to affect the Passions of the Reader, and hinder him from discerning the want of Connexion in any part of my Discourse

course : and shall be heartily glad if by this my *Essay* I shall provoke any one, that sees thro my Mistakes, to set me right in a matter of so great consequence as the Subject of it ; or, if it be thought that I have truly and justly stated the matter, one more able to do justice to the Argument than I am, to handle it in a more extensive manner.

F I N I S.

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